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Spy Agency That's Really Hidden

A Senate subcommittee on intelligence agencies during the 1973 session tried to find out more about the government's maze of secret fact-gatherers whom Congress finances so lavishly with so little check. So did a House subcommittee.

The House subcommittee wants to strengthen the law which bars the CIA from intelligence gathering or dirty tricks in this country. The revelation that the CIA had been involved in some of the activities of the Committee to Re-elect the President in 1972 shows the need for a closer rein on the spy agencies of the U.S. government.

The Senate subcommittee uncovered the name of one agency not previously known: the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO). The subcommittee report came out Oct. 12, listing NRO along with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and National Security Agency (NSA) as agencies which Congress should know more about.

Congressional Quarterly, a private reporting group, has been trying ever since to find out more about the mysterious NRO. One member of the Senate subcommittee, Senator Alan Cranston (Dem., Cal.), said he had never heard of NRO.

Congressional Quarterly asked people at the Pentagon, the White House and Congress and in two months was unable to find anyone who would confirm the existence of the NRO, much less tell what it does or where its offices are.

One informant at DIA did say it was probably a branch of the Air Force, but phoned the next day to take that back and say he had never heard of NRO.

The Washington Post in December said NRO has charge of the United States reconnaissance satellites and gets about \$1.5 billion a year through the Air Force. But no official will talk.

Yet the various government intelligence agencies employ altogether about 150,000 persons and spend about \$6 billion a year. The exact figures are secret; these are the best estimates of Senator William Proxmire (Dem., Wis.) who has long been trying to find out.

"Intelligence oversight committees" in Congress get more data — nine senators and 12 representatives drawn from the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees of the two houses. But they won't talk, and they generally go down the line for the agencies, even to the point of not asking questions. They have not co-operated in the effort of the two subcommittees to pry more information for Congress and the public.

It is "oversight" and then some for the government to spend a possible \$1.5 billion a year for an agency which nobody in government admits exists.

CIA 7.02 AIR FORCE (NRO)
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